

2009 Iron Butt Rally, Day -1
Sunday, August 23, 2009

Only a few riders had to get through tech inspection today, but the parking garage and parking lot were still bustling with activity as many riders proceeded to violate Rule Number 5 from the Iron Butt Association Archives of Wisdom:

“Avoid adding accessories or doing maintenance immediately before a trip.”

Actually, many of the riders violated the rule last week and are trying to fix problems today that cropped up on their ride to the start of the 2009 Iron Butt Rally.

John Harrison and I had to do two additional fuel capacity measurements on motorcycles equipped with auxiliary fuel cells that appeared to be very close to the limit based on their external dimensions. Mike Langford’s custom made aluminum cell on his K1200LT took 4.97 gallons, putting him 0.2 gallon under the 11.5 gallon limit.

Greg Roberts Holds a Light for John Harrison During a Fuel Density Test



The auxiliary cell on Ken Meese's K1200GT was a closer call. Ken's high-density polyethylene cell from Summit Racing is supposedly rated at 5 gallons, but another rider with the same cell claimed to have been able to put 5.2 gallons in the cell. With a 6.3 gallon OEM tank, that would put Ken right at the limit.

Ken might be fortunate that we did the measurement in the parking garage rather than after the cell had been sitting in the sun for a while. The "5 gallon" cell took on 5.14 gallons, bringing his total volume to 11.44 gallons, the highest volume recorded during the weekend.

Riders' Meeting

The Riders' Meeting started today at 2:00 p.m.

Chief Technical Inspector Dale "Warchild" Wilson started the meeting with an admonishment to riders that the rally was essentially starting right now and they needed to get very serious and not waste anyone's time with humor or stupid questions. Dale then explained the procedure for the start tomorrow morning, during which odometer readings will be recorded and rider identification tags will be punched. Riders were advised that "you need to be at your motorcycle at 8:30 a.m." Anyone who shows up late won't be cleared to leave until after the others have left at 10 a.m.

As the current custodian of the Iron Butt Rally rules, I spent quite a bit of time reviewing the most significant changes in the rules since the 2007 Rally and reviewing a few rules that some riders have had difficulty with in the past. The highlights of what the riders were told are as follows:

Electronic Waypoints – For the first time in an Iron Butt Rally, bonus locations are being provided electronically this year. At the beginning of each leg, each rider will receive a thumb drive containing the bonus locations for the leg in three different formats: gdb, gpx, and txt. All of the riders have had the opportunity to practice with sample versions of waypoint files to make sure they know how to load them into their mapping program.

What the riders learned at the meeting is that they will each be receiving unique files that have been encoded to allow each file to be associated with a specific rider. I made it clear that sharing these files with any other person will be grounds for disqualification, so don't expect to see them posted on some riders' forum later tonight.

Routing Assistance – In previous rallies, the rules allowed riders to receive routing assistance from "a trusted friend with a computer." Some riders ended up using a small army of friends who assumed total responsibility for route planning, giving the rider extra time to sleep. Because this fundamentally changed the concept of the Iron Butt Rally being a competition between individual riders, the rules have been changed. The new rules state that "outside assistance with route planning is prohibited." First time Iron Butt Rally riders are allowed to receive limited assistance from designated IBR staff, but staff assistance will be focused on helping plan a conservative route, not a winning route. The prohibition against outside assistance in routing was stressed.

Teams – Under the new rule banning outside assistance with routing, two or more riders can still work together to plan a route provided they inform the Rallymaster in advance that they are riding as a team for one or more legs of the rally. Once a team is formed, the team members must actually ride together to each bonus location. If any rider involved in a team effort fails to reach the same bonus locations as other riders involved in the team effort, then each rider in the team incurs a 10,000 point penalty for the leg. Upon notifying the Rallymaster, a team may be dissolved at completion of a leg before the bonus listings are distributed for a subsequent leg.

As soon as the new rule regarding teams was published there was a flurry of questions regarding how it would be interpreted. Riders have asked whether all team members receive a 10,000 point penalty if one team member is unable to continue because of some extraordinary reason. At the Riders' Meeting, it was made crystal clear that the penalty applies regardless of what the reason is, whether it's a mechanical breakdown, an accident, an illness, or an alien abduction. Riders must either succeed as a team or fail as a team.

Digital Photographs – One of the other new features of this year's rally is that the riders are allowed to use digital cameras. When I asked how many riders were NOT using a digital camera, only two hands were raised. To eliminate the need for scorers to deal with a variety of different memory cards, an extra step has been added to the scoring process. Before going to the scoring table, riders will first take their memory card to a table where IBR staff (Dave McQueeney and Bill Shaw) will collect the memory cards and copy the files to the thumb drive on which the rider received the waypoints for the leg.

A few other minor changes in this year's scoring process were also explained. I ended my comments with a sobering message on the importance of knowing when to quit, directed at the rookies who have never competed in a multi-day rally.

At the end of the Rider's Meeting, the thumb drives containing the waypoint files were distributed to the riders (without the bonus listings) and everyone was told to let IBR staff know immediately of any problem loading them into a mapping program. (Just a couple of riders had problems that were quickly resolved.)

Just before the start of the banquet, riders gathered on one of the hotel stairways for a group photo taken by Steve Hobart.

Banquet

The banquet buffet began at 5:30 p.m. Although everyone was focused on the upcoming rally, the buffet was really excellent, with pulled pork, barbequed ribs, fried chicken, Hoppin' John (a black-eyed pea and rice dish), mashed potatoes and gravy, perfectly prepared green beans, two salad choices, corn bread, and peach cobbler for dessert.

Group Photo on the Day Before the Start



As riders, guests, and staff were finishing their dinners, Mike Kneebone welcomed everyone to the 14th running of the Iron Butt Rally. Mike read the names of staff and volunteers who have been efficiently getting the riders through the check-in process all weekend. Mike then called me to the podium to go over a few last minute rule clarifications and to announce the target Leg 1 point value to ensure finisher status (9000).

Mike then called up Alex Harper and Barry Bertram, the two Suzuki RE-5 riders, and made sure everyone understood the historic significance of their attempt to finish on one of the same model motorcycles that tied for first place in the first Iron Butt Rally 25 years ago. Alex and Barry were assigned rider numbers 1 and 2 and then handed their Leg 1 bonus listings in a sealed envelope.

Rider number 3 was assigned to Joel Rappoport, who is riding the BMW R60/6 with half a million miles on it. (Due to a typo in the original version of yesterday's report, it might have appeared that IBR staff is helping Joel with his routing; however, we are only rooting for him, not routing for him, at least not on Leg 1.)

At that point Kneebone turned the podium over to Bob Higdon, the architect of this year's rally, to announce the remaining rider numbers. Numbers 4 through 17 were primarily assigned to riders from outside the U.S.: nine Canadians, two Australians, one rider each from the UK, Germany, and Ireland. (Number 8 went to Californian Alan Barbic; Canadian Neil Ward was assigned number 56.)

Rider numbers 18 to 24 were assigned to former top ten finishers; number 25 to 47 went to other IBR veterans; numbers 48 to 52 went to the five 2-up couples; and numbers 53 to 101 went to the remaining riders in no particular order.

The Leg 1 Bonus Listing

In recent years, there has been a "theme" for each Iron Butt Rally. In 2007, it was National Landmarks. In 2005, it was lighthouses. When the word leaked out that Bob Higdon was the architect of the 2009 rally, speculation was that the theme would be courthouses. This made perfect sense because, in 2008, the IBA's Chief Legal Counsel completed his quest to visit and photograph every county courthouse in the contiguous 48 states. There are a number of courthouses serving as bonus locations this year, but that's not the theme.

When riders were told they could open the envelope containing their bonus listing, the theme of this year's rally became clear to those who hadn't yet figured it out from the artwork on the shirts and posters and yellow lanyards for rider I.D. cards imprinted with "Crime Scene – Do Not Cross." Every bonus location has something to do with crime.

Some of the bonus locations are the scenes of crimes that everyone has heard about because they made national or even international news. At the other end of the spectrum are the scenes of crimes most people have never heard about because they occurred so long ago or were never covered by the national news media. The nature of the crimes described in the bonus locations range from some of the most horrendous examples of pure evil to some of the most hilarious examples of human stupidity. Riders will visit locations where crimes were committed by mass murderers, hypocritical politicians, and some of the most pathetic examples of human debris.

The options for Leg 1

The biggest single bonus on leg 1 is 12,683 points for a photo of the entrance sign to Saanich Peninsula Hospital, in Saanich, British Columbia. As explained in the bonus listing, this is the hospital where construction foreman Gavin Docherty was taken following a nail gun accident with a spike protruding from his forehead. But the crime had nothing to do with the nail gun accident. While being rushed to the hospital by his company's first-aid officer, a sharp-eyed patrolman noticed that Docherty wasn't wearing his seat belt. Docherty was given a ticket for \$167 before the driver was allowed to continue to the emergency room.

With only 60 hours to get to the first checkpoint, the 5,100 mile ride required to bag the Saanich bonus is out of the question. Hopefully, few riders will spend much time checking the route. Comments made by Rallymaster Lisa Landry made it crystal clear that this is an example of an impossible bonus. The point was to make it clear that just because something is contained in the bonus listing doesn't mean it's possible.

A more realistic biggie on Leg 1 is the 6,652 point Dike Bridge bonus on Chappaquiddick Island in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. The instructions and the bonus description read as follows:

Take a photo of your bike at the near end of Dike Bridge and produce a receipt for you and your bike for the ferry to Martha's Vineyard. Note: This is an expensive round trip on the ferry. Motorcycles are first come, first served and space is very limited.

Category: Leaving the scene of an accident

On the night of 7/18/1969 Senator Edward Kennedy drove off this bridge, leaving one of his political aides, Mary Jo Kopechne, trapped in the car to drown. Because the ferry had stopped running for the night, Kennedy swam back over to the main island and did not report the accident until 10 hours later.

(This particular bonus provides a pretty good example of the level of political correctness and sensitivity that has been used throughout the development of this year's Rally.)

Many riders are likely to shy away from this bonus because of the uncertainty associated with the required ferry ride. Tomorrow morning, we will find out how many riders are headed to Martha's Vineyard.

Less risk might be associated with a Southern loop with a turn-around in Key West. In past years, Key West has usually been considered a "sucker bonus." Will that be the case again this year? During the 2005 rally, Key West was a popular choice on the first leg because it was big points for a simple ride with relatively few other bonus options to complicate route planning. But, it wasn't a good choice. In the 2007 Rally, however, a route built around Key West made more sense. Brett Donahue took that route and ended up the 3rd place finisher.

Jeff Earls Describes His Preliminary Route Plan to Mike Kneebone



Tonight 101 riders are struggling with some difficult choices for where they will be riding for the next three days. At 8:30 a.m. tomorrow, we will know who is headed where.

Tom Austin

August 23, 2009

Copyright © 2009, Iron Butt Rally, Inc., Chicago, IL